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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003664

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2018

TAGS: PGOV PINR IZ

SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH RESIDENTS' OPINIONS ON PROPOSED SOFA

Classified By: PRT Diwaniyah Team Leader Robert Pitre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(U) This is a PRT Diwaniyah reporting cable.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: This cable summarizes comments about the proposed SOFA agreement made to the PRT by Diwaniyah city residents, including local officials. Some remarks were made during meetings scheduled by the PRT for other purposes, while most were made during conversations with PRT Locally Employed Staff (LES). Most residents who spoke with the PRT are aware of the SOFA in broad outline and the majority supports a continued U.S. presence in Iraq. Comments were made during the first two weeks of November. End summary.

¶2. (C) The following statements, which constitute just a fraction of the overall total of comments received, were made by people who support a continued U.S. presence in Iraq. Some expressed direct support for the SOFA, while others did not directly address the SOFA itself. The majority of everyday citizens voiced sentiments similar to those made by local dignitaries, but with an even stronger emphasis on fears of Iranian influence.

- Sheikh Hussein as-Shalaan, Council of Representatives member affiliated with the Iraqi National Accord: "The agreement between Iraq and America is necessary to organize relations between them...The agreement will be accepted and clear, especially after making some more amendments to it...U.S. withdrawal from Iraq must be conditioned by readiness of Iraqi troops."

- Mahmoud Hassan, Chamber of Commerce representative: "The U.S.-Iraq deal is good because it will rid Iraq of UN Article 7 and it maintains respect for Iraqi citizens."

- Amir, an Iraqi Army Captain: "The government of Iraq is a little too loyal to Iran. The U.S. presence is required to provide security for the country and limit Iranian influence."

- Sheikh Nabil, a tribal leader: "The presence of U.S. troops in Iraq will prevent Iranian elements from infiltrating Iraq, even if the conditions in the deal (SOFA) are tough, it is better than chancing Iranian presence."

- Majid, a local attorney: "The agreement is very necessary for Iraqis due to the benefits that it will bring our citizens. Iraqi troops are unable to provide enough security for our territory."

- Hamid Jat, a local doctor: "The continued U.S. presence in Iraq is necessary to sustain security but must not remain forever."

- Hasan Wa'ili, Governorate Electoral Officer, expressed concern over suspected ties between provincial political parties and Iran. "It is probable that Iran is funding, or attempting to bribe, their way into provincial politics. They are seeking to create puppet politicians." Wa'ili offered no direct evidence of this.

- Anonymous: "Iraq is threatened by neighboring countries and each neighboring state plans to take control of the parts of Iraq nearest to its borders."

- Anonymous: "I heard that Iranians insolently remarked that they will replace American forces - and the Americans are better than the Iranians."

¶3. (C) The following comments were made by people who oppose a continued U.S. presence in Iraq and do not support the SOFA.

- Abid Muslim Alghizi, Provincial Council Member affiliated with Iraqi National Accord: "No deal can be made without telling people the requirements of it...It is shameful for the U.S. Government to use a threatening manner so as to force the Iraqi Government to approve the (SOFA) with the U.S. The fact is that it is too sensitive for Iraqis to do that. (The U.S.) used to teach their soldiers to respect Iraqis and not eat in front of the fasting Muslims of Iraq, but the proposed pact is different."

- Anonymous: "The existence of coalition forces is a violation of the sovereignty of Iraq and that brings us back to colonial military control."

- Anonymous: "The presence of these forces in Iraq and on the land of the prophets, messengers, and imams is a desecration of our land and a violation of our rights."

¶4. (C) Comment: Provincial government employees and local citizens express concerns about their lack of understanding about the SOFA, its details, and its implications. The

BAGHDAD 00003664 002 OF 002

majority of people who have discussed the SOFA with the PRT have been favorably inclined toward signing it -- albeit in some cases with (unspecified) amendments. Sometimes key members within the same party express wildly divergent opinions. Many Diwaniyah residents have concerns about a continued U.S. presence but even greater worries about Iran. While the province is currently under an Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI) government, which has pro-Iranian leanings, local officials also seem to have concerns with a possible failure to sign the SOFA. End comment.

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